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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/I

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SUBJECT: JORDAN NAMES AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ

REF: AMMAN 1658

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On June 30, the GOJ swore in Nayef Fantoul al-Zeidan as Ambassador to Iraq, following through on last month's pledge to finally appoint a representative in Baghdad, after a long gap (reftel). This is the latest in a series of steps suggesting that the King is having success reorienting his country toward a more constructive policy regarding its eastern neighbor.

¶2. (SBU) According to his official CV, Zeidan was born in 1952. A career diplomat, he holds a BA in Political Science and General Management from the University of Jordan (1974) and a Masters Degree in International Affairs from Fairleigh Dickinson University (1997). Before joining the Foreign Ministry in 1982, he was Chief Editor for Arabic news at Jordan TV (1978-1982). He has served in Algeria (1983-87), Germany (1988-92), Spain (1993-97). He was Advisor and Number Two at Jordan's Mission in Geneva (1988-2002), and then Minister Counselor and DCM in Tehran (2003-05). Before taking up his most recent post as Consul General for Dubai and the Northern Emirates in 2006, he was Assistant Manager to the Asian, African and Australian Department at the MFA. He is listed as fluent in English.

¶3. (C) To date, media mention of Zeidan has not gone beyond brief mention of his appointment. However in a conversation with PolOff, Al-Ghad journalist Mohammed Abu Rumman expressed disappointment that a career diplomat was chosen as Jordan's Ambassador to Iraq instead of a former minister or politician, saying Zeidan was "not a suitable choice." Abu Rumman added that Zeidan's lack of a "strong background" indicated that he was merely a place holder: "They just want to send anyone." Abu Rumman believes Jordan needs a shrewd Ambassador with political skills. He thinks that the expansive cadre of former ministers is a deep bench to draw from, and that the King and MFA made a strategic mistake by not taking advantage of the expertise that such former officials can offer. Comment: Foreign Minister Salaheddin al-Bashir told Ambassador that sending an experienced career diplomat to Baghdad was a conscious GOJ decision to ensure that an able diplomat committed to faithful implementation of Jordanian policy was in place, not someone with baggage or personal agendas. He also viewed Zeidan as having a more sophisticated understanding of Iran and the dynamics of the Gulf region than the average Jordanian diplomat. End Comment.

¶4. (C) Former Ambassador to Iraq Bassam Kakish was not so perturbed by Zeidan's purported status as a lightweight (though he did note that his main qualification was probably his loyalty to the King). For Kakish, having a former minister take the post was not essential. Far more important than who is sent to Iraq is the fact that someone is taking the job at all. He considered Zeidan's tenure from 2003-3005 as DCM in Tehran to be significant, speculating that this

experience would help him understand the role of Iranian influence in Iraq, and that he may even have some contacts as a holdover from his time in the area. Whatever the case, Kakish said the new Ambassador would most likely be preoccupied with his own security given the ongoing violence.

Biographic Note

¶5. (C) According to CG Dubai, Zeidan is well disposed toward the U.S. and Americans. He has a polished manner and presents well, though the CG rates his English as a "2" by State Department standards rather than the fluency claimed on his CV. Zeidan seeks to avoid controversial issues in public settings. He strongly believes Jordan should improve its relations with Baghdad - key, in his view, to encouraging the return of the many displaced Iraqis now in Jordan. He has said Jordan cannot sustain those numbers of the long haul. While highly suspicious of Iranian motives and actions, he does not seem as concerned as many other Jordanian officials about the notion of a dangerous "Shia crescent." Though he is likely to work to repair relations with the Maliki government and its successors, he is unlikely to be a powerhouse. Per CG Dubai, Zeidan is a quiet man whose wife, Jaythal, is more gregarious and "every bit the modern Jordanian woman" (the only local Arab ConGen spouse who does not cover herself to some degree). End Bio Note.

¶6. (U) This cable has been cleared by ConGen Dubai.
Hale